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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3074
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 4492
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 0589
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA 0490

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STATE FOR EAP/ANP
PACOM FOR JO1E/J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ

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TAGS: PGOV PREL CW NZ XV

SUBJECT: COOK ISLANDS: QUEEN'S REPRESENTATIVE DISSOLVES
PARLIAMENT

REF: WELLINGTON 221

(U) Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine
¶B. Hadda, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (U) On July 24, the Queen's Representative dissolved the Cook Islands Parliament and called for a snap election. The move came ahead of a vote of no confidence in the Cabinet. A new election must be held within ninety days. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Queen's Representative, HE Sir Frederick Goodwin, dissolved the Cook Islands Parliament at 9:00 a.m. local time, July 24. Under the Constitution, the QR has the discretion to dissolve Parliament if requested by the Prime Minister. According to New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), PM Jim Marurai met with QR Goodwin late on the evening of Friday, July 21 to discuss options ahead of a vote on a motion of no confidence in the Cabinet, scheduled to take place on the 24th.

¶3. (U) The events leading to the dissolution of Parliament began with intense political maneuvering surrounding by-elections in the Teenui-Mapumai and Matavera electorates -- which went to Speaker Norman George (Independent) and Kiriau Turepu (Cooks Islands Party, or CIP) respectively. Prior to the Matavera by-election on July 18, Teina Bishop (CIP) Minister of Outer Islands (who was in Cabinet despite being from the Opposition), resigned in support of the CIP. With Turepu's victory in Matavera, there was an apparent 12-12 split between Democratic Party coalition government and the Opposition. Speaker George indicated he would break convention and support the Opposition in a non-confidence motion on the Cabinet, giving the upper hand to the CIP.

¶4. (C) MFAT anticipated that the motion of no-confidence would carry, and that the CIP would be able to form a government. QR's decision to dissolve Parliament came as a surprise to the New Zealand High Commission in Rarotonga and MFAT officials in Wellington. At this time, MFAT is not able to make predictions about election outcomes. However, MFAT reports that the High Commission observes a general sense of relief in the public following QR Goodwin's decision to dissolve Parliament, which many feel brings a sense of stability and a welcome break from the mercurial political loyalties in the chamber.

¶5. (SBU) Under the Constitution, a general election must be held within ninety days. A provision of the Constitution allows for a 90-day period of government operations without a budget. The snap election will need to occur early enough to

ensure that an appropriation bill is passed before the end of 90 days. MFAT anticipates that an election will be held earlier, but no earlier than six weeks.

McCormick